



*Language, Politics, and Society in India*

# I Assignment

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# *Languages*

*Tamil*




# *Dravidian*

*Tulu*







Linguistics in colonial India, often driven by the colonizer for the Empire's motives, emerged from an institutional need to manage and contain overwhelming linguistic diversity by framing it as disorderly and excessive — akin to a Babel-like confusion.

# CENTRAL THESES

These gave rise to what Greenblatt calls “*fantasmatic representations of authoritative certainty*” about languages, often in the face of “*spectacular ignorance*”. Colonial surveys naturalised hierarchies among languages and produced differential legitimacy through iconization, erasure and fractal recursivity.



For our specific examples of language ideologies, we look at the markedly different treatment of Tamil and Tulu in the colonial linguistic archive, particularly the Linguistic Survey of India Vol. IV (Munda & Dravidian Languages).

# C E N T R A L T H E S I S

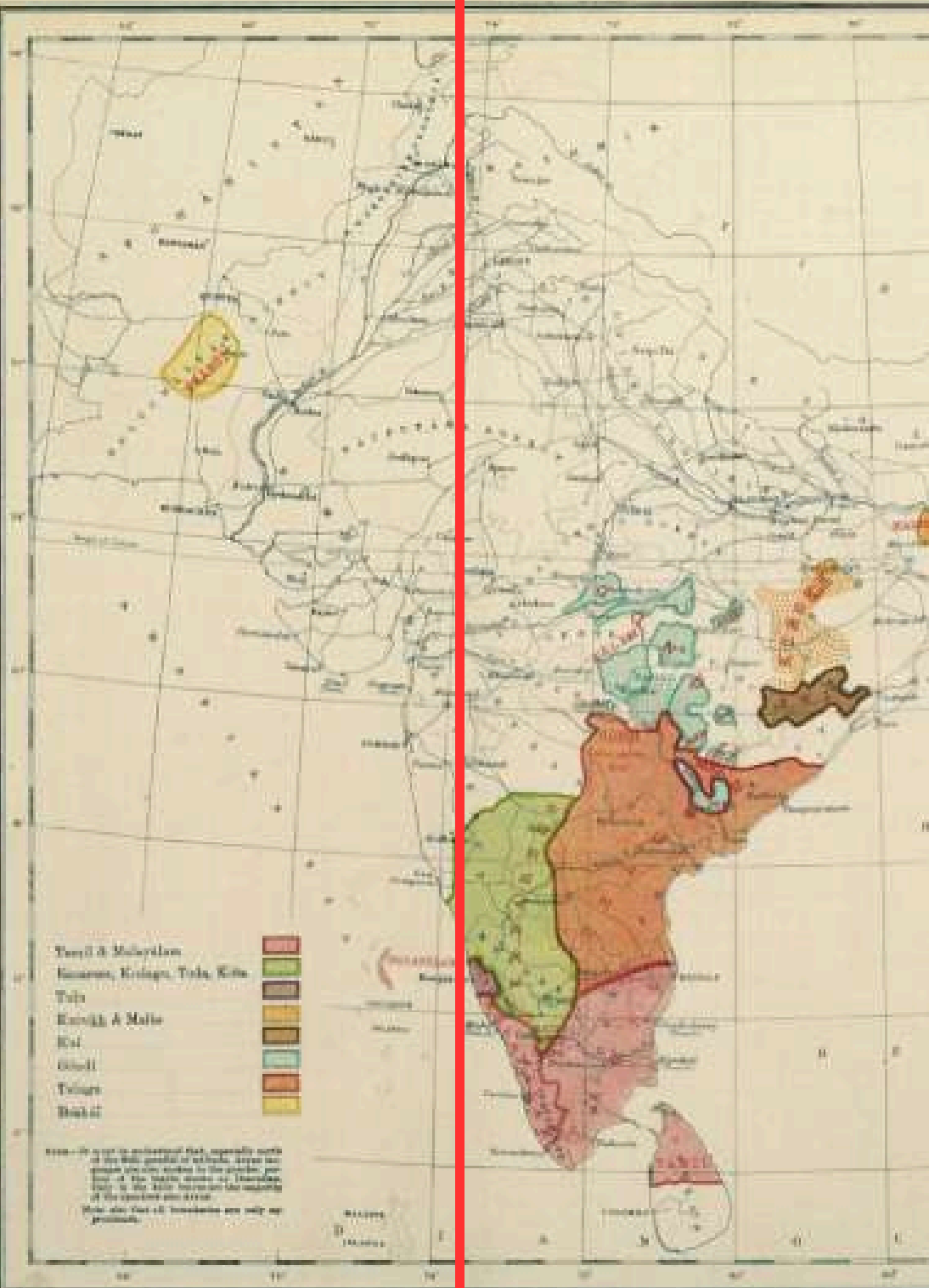
Where one witnesses the iconization of Tamil as ancient, literary, and structurally “pure”, it is immediately contrasted with the relegation of Tulu, a language with minimal literary presence, to the margins without its own space as a legitimate linguistic entity.



The disparity reflects broader colonial ideologies where European structures of territoriality and bounded linguistic (and thus cultural) homogeneity normalized monoglot circumstances to manage India's complex linguistic landscape, transforming multilingualism into a problem to be regulated.

# C E N T R A L T H E S I S

Our thesis thus emerges from this broader understanding: the colonial linguistic archive worked beyond recording languages, producing ideological distinctions to serve colonial projects of categorization and control.



Swahili & Malayalam  
 Hamar, Kikuyu, Tutsi, Kwa  
 Tutsi  
 Kisumu & Mafu  
 Kis  
 Gusii  
 Tulung  
 Bantu

Note: It is to be understood that, especially north  
 of the main body of the map, there are  
 many other small groups in the vicinity of  
 the main body of the map. These  
 are in the list, but are not shown on the map  
 of the present map.

Note also that all boundaries are only as  
 indicated.

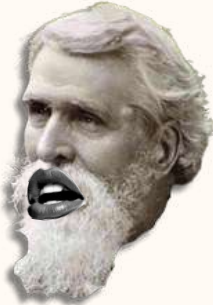
*Starring:*



US



IRVINE & GAL



BISHOP CALDWELL



GEORGE GRIERSON

*Linguistic  
Differentiation*

*... accounts will also be given of Tamil, Malayalam, Kanarese, and Telugu, the principal Dravidian languages of the South. The minor dialects of Southern India, on the other hand, such as Kodagu, Tuḷu, Toda, and Kōta, will not be described. (Pg. 277)*

*Notwithstanding its want of a literature, Tulu is one of the most highly developed languages of the Dravidian family. (Pg. 282)*

*The best known Dravidian languages are Tamil, Malayāḷam, Kanarese, and Telugu. They have all for a long time been used as literary languages. (Pg. 277)*

*We can only note the fact that the literary dialects usually represent a stage of development older than the colloquial forms. (Pg. 282)*





I see what you're doing there,  
Grierson. Principal >  
Colloquial. Literary > Oral.  
You are creating hierarchies.



Linguistic differentiation 101!



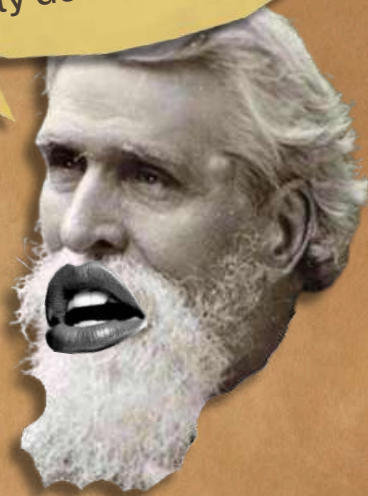
And look closely! This same  
superiority-inferiority logic is  
applied within Tamil. Sen-Damir  
(Classical) > Kodun-Damir  
(Colloquial).



That's **fractal recursivity!**  
Zoom out, zoom in, the  
same opposition exists.



Hey, I said something  
nice too! I called Tulu  
"highly developed."



While Grierson called  
it a "minor dialect."  
Make up your minds?



Pardon this white man. Tulu  
didn't have a written  
literature, then. And I found  
the pronunciation puzzling  
and peculiar.



Ah, the good ol' colonial gaze.  
Where "peculiar pronunciation"  
really just means different from  
what you're used to. Right?





*Starring:*



US



IRVINE & GAL



BERNARD COHN



GEORGE GRIERSON

*Erasure &  
Territorial  
Fixity*

*This language is spoken in a very limited district and by a very small number of people. The Chandragiri and Kalyanapuri rivers, in the district of Canara, are regarded as its ancient boundaries, and it does not appear ever to have extended much beyond them. (Pg. 283)*

*Tamil has usually been considered to be the Dravidian language which has preserved most traces of the original form of speech from which all other Dravidian dialects are derived. (Pg. 283)*





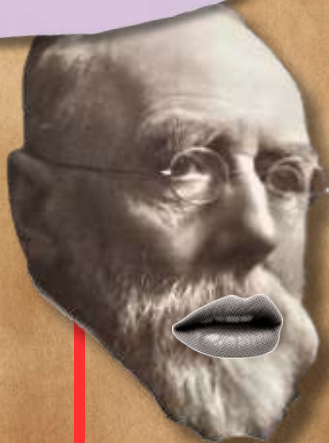
Ah, so Tamil gets to be the  
"mother" of Dravidian languages.  
Revered, ancient, elegant...



Erasure spotted! Flattening  
dialectal diversity and ignoring  
Tamil's diasporic lives? Classic  
case of simplifying complexity  
for legibility.



Well... it makes census  
and governance easier.



And Tulu - You mean the whole language is boxed in by two rivers? What about historical trade routes? Migration? Oral traditions?



Ah, yes. That's what we called objectification. Languages turned into measurable units. Clean. Mappable. Governable. We had to "enumerate, categorise, and hierarchise".



Fixing language to territory again. Ignoring fluid multilingual realities. Tulu gets minimized, Tamil gets monumentalized. Both get boxed in.



Okay, I admit. It was all for administrative convenience...



#### CONTEMPORARY NOTES

- Tulu still excluded from the Eighth Schedule.
- Tamil's classical identity dominates state politics, sidelining caste-based and diasporic variants.



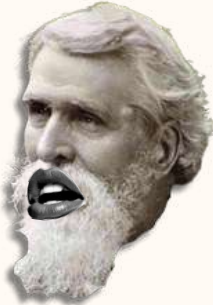
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GEORGE GRIERSON

*Iconization &  
Indexicality*

Wherever money is to be made, wherever a more apathetic or a more aristocratic people is waiting to be pushed aside, thither swarm the Tamilians, the Greek or Scotch of the East, the least superstitious and the most enterprising and persevering race of Hindus. (Pg. 299)

The name Tulu means, according to Mr. Brigel, mild, meek, humble, and is to be regarded therefore as properly denoting the people, not their language. (Pg. 283)



So you're saying, Tamil is more than a language? It is also ambition, rationality, and entrepreneurial spirit? That is a whole personality type!



Bingo. That's **Iconization**! It is when language features are projected onto social groups as if they are natural traits.



Ah, so while Tamil is lauded as the language of ambition, Tulu is reduced to meekness?

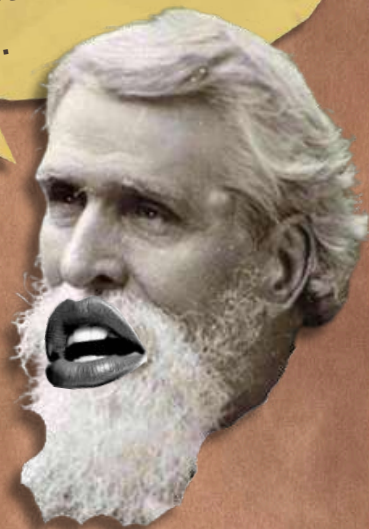




Oooh, that's **Indexicality** at work! It is when language is connected to social identity in ways that erase complexity and political agency.



But don't you see, it is all just observation! Hehe.



Nope, it is colonial storytelling. You are turning stereotypes into linguistic facts.





## *Works Cited*

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